



# Commissioner's Handbook

- Seattle Commission  
for Sexual Minorities
- Seattle Human Rights Commission
- Seattle Women's Commission

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[www.seattle.gov/womenscommission/](http://www.seattle.gov/womenscommission/)  
[www.seattle.gov/hrc.comm/](http://www.seattle.gov/hrc.comm/)



# Table of Contents

1.	OVERVIEW .....	5
2.	EFFECTIVE COMMISSION PARTICIPATION.....	5
3.	OPEN PUBLIC MEETING ACT .....	6
4.	RESTRICTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS.....	6
5.	ETHICAL STANDARDS .....	7
6.	COMMISSION DUTIES.....	9
7.	ADVISORY FUNCTION .....	11
8.	POLICY MAKING .....	12
9.	LOBBYING .....	13
10.	TESTIFYING AT HEARINGS.....	15
11.	CITY OF SEATTLE BUDGET PROCESS .....	16
12.	MEDIA CONTACT .....	18
13.	ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION.....	19
14.	RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCR AND COMMISSIONS .....	20
15.	SUMMARY.....	23

### 1. OVERVIEW

The City of Seattle welcomes community participation at many levels, from residents accessing City services to participation in the formulation and implementation of public policy.

Currently, the City of Seattle has nearly 50 boards and commission that carry out a variety of advisory and legal functions. Service on boards and commission is voluntary. While each board or commission has specific functions, all serve as policy advisors to the Mayor, the Seattle City Council, and City Departments.

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) provides staff support to three commissions: the Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities, the Seattle Human Rights Commission, and the Seattle Women's Commission.

This Handbook describes the roles and responsibilities common to all three commissions, and highlights topics most frequently referenced by Commissioners during their tenure. Each commission also has its own handbook or policy and procedures manual. We hope these materials are helpful to you, and we encourage you to review them periodically.

The SOCR Director and staff welcome your comments and input. **Thank you** for your commitment and willingness to serve on a commission.

### 2. EFFECTIVE COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

Effective service as a Commissioner for the City of Seattle means that you:

- Stay informed about current issues;
- Regularly attend meetings;
- Read materials and familiarize yourself with relevant issues prior to meetings;
- Commit to serve the public interest;
- Ensure that your commission operates in compliance with open government laws;
- Consider all information before making a decision;
- Provide highly valued and essential advice, understanding that decision-making authority ultimately rests with elected officials and municipal employees;
- Work with other Commissioners to make decisions; and

- Try to reach consensus with other commissioners on commission issues.

One of the fundamental responsibilities of any Commissioner is to stay informed about current issues, legislative activities, and laws that affect the work of the commission and those whom it serves.

Regular attendance at meetings is necessary for effective commission participation. In this way, you'll be able to stay informed about commission concerns and work projects. It also helps ensure that a broad perspective of views are included. The By-laws of each commission define attendance requirements. A Commissioner may forfeit his/her position on a commission as a result of poor attendance.

### **3. OPEN PUBLIC MEETING ACT**

The Open Public Meeting Act (Revised Code of Washington Chapter 42.30) applies to the governing bodies of public agencies. Many City of Seattle Commissions qualify as governing bodies and therefore their meetings are subject to that law.

The OPMA has two primary requirements - that meetings be publicly noticed and that they be open to the public. A commission's regular meeting time and place should be posted (for example, on the commission's website). The time and place of a special meeting (a meeting held at a different time or place), along with the agenda for that meeting, must be publicized by providing at least twenty-four hours advance notice to the Seattle daily newspapers. All meetings, regular and special, must be open to the public unless an agenda item or items fall within particular circumstances described in the law. Also, minutes of all meetings must be recorded and made available to the public, unless a particular topic is exempt under the law.

### **4. RESTRICTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

The following restrictions and requirements affect you during the time you serve as a Commissioner:

- Commissioners operate within their governing statutes and by-laws. To ensure accountability, policies and procedures are in written form.
- In professional or social settings, a Commissioner's public statements will be interpreted as representing the commission; therefore it is vital to receive your commission's authorization prior to making a public statement on any commission business.

## Commissioners' Handbook

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- Commissioners must not make unilateral decisions or take action without the consent of the commission as a whole.
- A Commissioner's mission is to serve the public. It is not appropriate to use a commission membership to create a personal platform.
- The law prohibits Commissioners from accepting or soliciting anything of economic value (such as a gift, gratuity, or favor) if there is any reason to believe that it is given because of commission membership.
- Details of commission business discussed in closed executive sessions are considered confidential and should not be disclosed without prior consultation with your commission.
- Commissioners are appointed either by the Mayor, City Council or the commission itself. Any resignation should be in writing and directed to the appropriate appointing authority.
- Use of telephones, other equipment, municipal funds or services (such as photocopying) is restricted to City of Seattle business only.

If you have questions or concerns about commission issues or process, SOCR's commission staff liaisons, the Director of Policy and Outreach, and the SOCR Director are valuable resources. Do not hesitate to consult with them for timely advice on commission issues.

## 5. ETHICAL STANDARDS

Commissioners must uphold high ethical standards. The standards for members of the Human Rights Commission are defined by the City of Seattle Code of Ethics (Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 4.16).

Many committees, boards and commissions are subject to the Code of Ethics.<sup>1</sup> It is extremely important that members of commissions avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest, and that commissions adopt policies and procedures to ensure their advisory status and independence.

The Code of Ethics sets standards of conduct to ensure that public employees and commissioners perform their duties in the public interest. The City of Seattle Ethics

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<sup>1</sup> The Code of Ethics applies to all boards and commissions, even purely advisory ones, unless they are "ad hoc" (not created by Charter, ordinance, or other law). The HRC, SCSM, and Women's Commission are all created by ordinance and therefore are subject to the Ethics Code.

## Commissioner's Handbook

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and Elections Commission can discuss concerns with you and suggest alternative actions to take. You also can request an advisory opinion about ethical standards or conflicts of interest. You should feel free to call or e-mail with any questions (684-8500, [ethicsandelections@seattle.gov](mailto:ethicsandelections@seattle.gov)). For complicated questions, you can make your request in writing and explain all of the pertinent facts and circumstances. Advisory opinions are intended to guide future conduct. Additionally, the Ethics and Elections Commission has indexed its opinions back to 1974.

**In review, Commissioners are not allowed to:**

- Act on City of Seattle business in which they have a private or financial interest;
- Hold a financial or beneficial interest in a City of Seattle transaction made by, through, or under their supervision;
- Use their official position improperly;
- Accept any gift or loan that would appear or be intended to influence action on City matters;
- Disclose privileged or proprietary information.

**Some examples of misuse of a Commissioners' position**

- Directing a City of Seattle contract to a firm in which the Commissioner has a financial interest;
- Accepting gifts or favors in exchange for certain regulatory rulings;
- Obtaining personal favors from an employee;
- Accepting gifts or favors for disclosure of confidential information;
- Accepting gifts or favors in exchange for making certain purchases;
- Engaging in outside employment which assists non-governmental entities in their quest for state business;
- Taking any official action involving an organization in which the Commissioners is involved;
- Using a Commission position to obtain a private contract or other private gain.

Commissioners can avoid a conflict of interest by following statutory restrictions, using good judgment, maintaining an appearance of fairness, and being fair at all times. If you perceive a potential conflict of interest while serving as a Commissioner, bring this to the attention of your commission's SOCR staff liaison right away.

## **6. COMMISSION DUTIES**

### **1. Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities**

The Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities (SCSM), founded in 1989 and formerly known as the Commission for Lesbians and Gays, consists of 15 volunteer members who work to ensure that the City of Seattle fairly and equitably addresses sexual minority concerns. The name of the commission was changed in 1997 to include lesbians, gays, bisexual, and transgendered people. The SCSM meets on the third Thursday evening of each month from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. The duties of the SCSM (as per Seattle Municipal Code 3.14.932) are to:

- 1.1. Provide information to the Mayor, Seattle City Council, and other City departments and offices concerning issues of importance to gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered communities (GLBT);
- 1.2. Assist City of Seattle departments to address the concerns of GLBT, individually and as a protected class under City ordinance and other applicable laws;
- 1.3. Recommend policies as appropriate to all departments and offices of the City of Seattle in matters affecting gay, lesbian, and sexual minority concerns, and recommend legislation for the implementation of such policies;
- 1.4. Encourage understanding between GLBT communities and the larger Seattle community through long-range projects;
- 1.5. Report on a semi-annual basis to the Mayor and the Seattle City Council. The reports shall include an annual or semi-annual work plan, a briefing of the Commission's public involvement process for soliciting community and citizen input in framing the annual work plan, and updates on the work plan;
- 1.6. Meet on a quarterly basis through a designated representative with the Seattle Women's Commission and the Seattle Human Rights Commission to ensure coordination and joint project development.

### **2. Seattle Human Rights Commission**

The Seattle Human Rights Commission (SHRC), established in 1963, is made up of 15 residents of Seattle. The commission advocates for justice and equal opportunity, and collaborates with and educates public and private sectors about how to prevent and eliminate discrimination citywide.

The Commission reviews proposed City of Seattle ordinances to determine their potential impact on human rights. The SHRC also hears appeals, based on findings from

## Commissioner's Handbook

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the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR), regarding discrimination charges in the areas of employment (both private sector and City government), housing, contracting, and public accommodations. The commission also makes recommendations concerning the development of programs that promote equality and justice.

The Seattle Human Rights Commission meets on the first Thursday evening of each month from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Duties of the SHRC (as per Seattle Municipal Code 3.14.931 SMC and SMC 14.04.070):

- 2.1. Consult with and make recommendations to the Director of SOCR and other City departments and officials with regard to the development of programs for the promotion of equality, justice, and understanding among all citizens of the City;
- 2.2. Consult with and make recommendations to the Director of SOCR with regard to problems arising in the City which may result in discrimination on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, national origin, sex, parental status, sexual orientation, use of a service animal, political ideology, age, gender identity, ancestry, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability; and make such investigations and hold such hearings as necessary to identify such problems;
- 2.3. Recommend policies as appropriate to all departments and offices of the City of Seattle in matters affecting civil rights and equal opportunity, and recommend legislation for the implementation of such policies;
- 2.4. Encourage understanding among all protected classes and the larger Seattle community through long-range projects;
- 2.5. Hear appeals and hearings as set forth in Chapters 14.04 and 14.08 of the Seattle Municipal Code;
- 2.6. Report on a semi-annual basis to the Mayor and Seattle City Council. The reports shall include an annual or semi-annual work plan, a briefing of the Commission's public involvement process for soliciting community and citizen input in framing the annual work plan, and updates on the work plan.
- 2.7. Meet on a quarterly basis through a designated representative with the Seattle Women's Commission and the Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities to ensure coordination and joint project development.

### **3. Seattle Women's Commission**

The Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) is a 20-member advisory body created by City of Seattle ordinance in 1971 to advise the Mayor, City Council, and City of Seattle



departments on issues affecting women. In addition to its advisory role, the SWC involves itself with the community and works with other groups and organizations in areas of mutual concern. The commission helps to identify issues, develop strategies, provide education, and advocate for equal opportunity and equal participation for women.

The SWC meets on the third Monday evening of each month from 5:30 - 8:00 p.m. Commissioners attend these regular meetings and actively participate in one or more projects of the Commission on an on-going basis. The duties of the SWC (as per Seattle Municipal Code 3.14.930 SMC) are to:

- 3.1. Advise the Mayor, Seattle City Council, and other City departments and offices with respect to matters concerning women;
- 3.2. Provide information to the Mayor, Seattle City Council, and other City departments and offices on issues of importance to women;
- 3.3. Assist City departments to address fairly the concerns of women, both individually and as a protected class, under City ordinance and other applicable laws;
- 3.4. As appropriate, recommend policies to all departments and offices of the City in matters affecting women and recommend legislation for the implementation of such policies;
- 3.5. Report on a semi-annual basis to the Mayor and the Seattle City Council. The reports shall include an annual or semi-annual work plan, a briefing of the Commission's public involvement process for soliciting community and citizen input in framing the annual work plan, and updates on the work plan.
- 3.6. Meet on a quarterly basis through a designated representative with the Seattle Human Rights Commission and the Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities to ensure coordination and joint project development.

## 7. ADVISORY FUNCTION

The Seattle Women's Commission, the Seattle Human Rights Commission and the Seattle Commission on Sexual Minorities serve in an advisory capacity to the Mayor, the City Council, and other City departments. The information and advice that Commissioners provide about community needs, concerns, and opinions can have a profound impact on City policies and lead to improved services for all residents. In their advisory capacity, Commissioners play a special role in recommending solutions to

important societal and governmental issues. Although Commissioners make important recommendations about policy, they do not have final decision-making authority to set governmental policy.

When presenting recommendations to the Mayor, the Seattle City Council, or to a City department, it is helpful to:

- Frame your ideas clearly and specifically;
- Consider the viability and cost-effectiveness of your proposals;
- Include detailed reasons for your suggestions;
- Be sure your advice reflects a consensus of the commission;
- Communicate with relevant departments regarding issues of concern early to exert maximum influence;
- Check to make sure your recommendations are lawful.

Commissions sometimes adopt positions that are contrary to those of the Mayor, the Seattle City Council, or a particular City department. It is a good strategy to notify SOCR commission staff, SOCR Director of Policy and Outreach, or SOCR Director *prior* to making public statements that are potentially controversial. This gives the commission and policy-makers an opportunity to have a frank exchange of views.

## 8. POLICY MAKING

Policy helps to define an organization's intent and direction. Policy should be set forth in broad terms to remain applicable and usable for a long time. It should be stated clearly and concisely. It should not be so detailed that it dictates how, when, or where things must be done. Policy can be amended, rewritten, or abolished, and should be reviewed periodically to make sure it remains appropriate and relevant.

As a Commissioner, you should become knowledgeable about the policies of the City of Seattle and the policies in the community at large that affect your commission. During your time on the commission, you may be asked to provide advice about policy as well as assist in the formulation of policy.

Follow as inclusive a process as possible when developing policy, and involve all members of the commission. Involve legislators, staff from City of Seattle departments, community organizations, businesses, and others potentially affected. Be sure to consult legal representatives and lawmakers. Remember, there are many resources within and beyond the City of Seattle that can assist you by providing examples,

historical background, and information about current trends at local, regional, and national levels.

### 9. LOBBYING

Lobbying is defined as "attempting to influence the passage or defeat of any legislation by the legislature of the state of Washington, or the adoption or rejection of any rule, standard, rate, or other legislative enactment of any state agency under the state Administrative Procedures Act, Chapter 34.05 RCW." See Revised Code of Washington RCW 42.17.030(27).

"Legislation" refers to "bills, resolutions, motions, amendments, nomination, and other matters pending or proposed in either house of the state legislature, and includes any other matter that may be the subject of action by either house or any committee of the legislature and all bills and resolutions that, having passed both houses, are pending approval by the governor." See RCW 42.17.030(26).

#### **What you need to know about lobbying:**

The law that addresses lobbying by agencies using public funds (i.e. SOCR and commissions) is found in RCW 42.17.190, subsections (2) through (8). RCW 42.17.190(2) begins by prohibiting the use of public funds directly or indirectly for lobbying, absent express legal authority (see authority outlined below).

RCW 42.17.190(3) grants all agencies general authority to lobby using public funds, but **limits** that authority to:

- Communicating with state officeholders or employees on official agency business;
- Advocating only the official position or interest of the agency.

In other words, the law prohibits Commissioners from using public funds to lobby on matters not related to the Commission's mission. Additionally, the law prohibits Commissioners from using public funds to lobby for any position that has not been formally adopted by the City. However, Commissioners are **not** prevented from communicating with legislators at the member's request, nor from requesting, through proper official channels, necessary legislative action or funding.

#### **Gifts and campaign contributions:**

RCW 42.17.190(3) prohibits Commissioners from spending public funds, directly or indirectly, for **gifts or campaign contributions**. Gifts include anything of value, such as meals, beverages, travel expenses, theater or sporting event tickets, art work,

flowers, etc. A campaign contribution is anything of value to a campaign, such as a monetary contribution or an in-kind item or service.

### **Prohibition against using public resources to support or oppose any candidate or ballot measure:**

RCW 42.17.130 generally prohibits public officials and employees, including Commissioners, from using or authorizing the use of any public facilities (telephones, postage, vehicles, copiers, or staff time, for example) to support or oppose any candidate or ballot measure. RCW 42.17.190(4) similarly prohibits the use of public facilities to support or oppose any initiative to the legislature. These laws do allow public officials and employees to engage in a limited number of specific activities described in the law. If a commission is interested in any ballot measure (state or local) or any initiative to the legislature, the commission should consult with their SOCR staff contact for further advice before using any public funds or facilities.

### **Reporting:**

RCW 42.17.190(5) speaks to what information must be **reported** by state agencies and other public entities. The focus is primarily on identifying persons who lobbied during the quarter, disclosing their salaries, and showing how much was spent on their travel allowances. SOCR files a quarterly report detailing all lobbying activities, including in-person lobbying, with the City's Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR). OIR in turn files a report with the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) on behalf of all departments, offices, boards, and commissions of the City of Seattle. It is very important, therefore, that Commissioners communicate details of any lobbying activities to SOCR staff in a timely manner.

### **Summary on lobbying:**

The only lobbying of the state legislature that a Commissioner may undertake (unless specific authority is given elsewhere in law) is:

- Communicating with legislators at the member's request;
- Requesting legislative action or appropriations through normal communication channels;
- Providing information to legislators or their staff on matters pertaining to official commission business;
- Advocating the official position or interest of the City of Seattle (at the request of or in coordination with the City's Office of Intergovernmental Relations).

### **Please remember:**

- No grass roots lobbying campaigns aimed at the general public;
- No campaign contributions using taxpayer funds;
- No gifts paid for with public dollars.

Reporting is necessary only for in-person lobbying conducted by non-elected officials or employees directed at state legislators and their staff members. This includes time spent testifying at state-level public hearings. Anyone (including elected officials) who spends over \$15 of non-public money on behalf of legislators or their staff needs to report it.

Telephone conversations, preparation of correspondence, preparation or adoption of policy positions do **not** constitute reportable lobbying. Attempts to influence federal or local legislation do **not** constitute reportable lobbying. It is **only** state-level in-person lobbying that you need to report.

Feel free at any time to confer with the SOCR Director of Policy and Outreach about a particular situation or question you may have related to lobbying.

## 10. TESTIFYING AT HEARINGS

At times, Commissioners have the opportunity to testify at Seattle City Council hearings or state legislative hearings in Olympia. When providing testimony, Commissioners represent the positions of the commission. It is important to refrain from expressing personal opinions. It is helpful to provide a written statement authorized by your commission Chair or Co-Chairs prior to the testimony. In this way, you provide accurate and concrete information to the Councilmembers or Legislators as well as represent the official position of your commission.

### **Testimony is most effective when:**

- It reflects the commission's position (not a personal opinion);
- It is concise and accurate;
- It emphasizes key points (instead of reading verbatim from written text);
- It coordinates with the testimony of other presenters and avoids repetition;
- It is not overly technical;
- The presenter is prepared to answer questions and when unable to answer, offers to provide a written response as follow up to the testimony;

- The presenter follows through with commitments to forward additional information following the testimony.

Remember, providing testimony at the state-level is reportable lobbying and you need to let SOCR staff know about these activities. Also, any in-person contact with state legislators or their staff before or after testifying at a hearing may be considered lobbying and should be reported to SOCR.

*Note:* If you are testifying or being paid to lobby in another role other than as a Commissioner, you may need to register with the PDC. Feel free to call SOCR for more information.

## 11. CITY OF SEATTLE BUDGET PROCESS

Washington State law requires cities to adopt balanced budgets by December 2<sup>nd</sup> of each year for the fiscal year beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. The adopted budget appropriates funds and establishes legal expenditure limits for the upcoming fiscal year. The Mayor proposes a biennial budget to City Council in September every other year. The City Council formally reviews, amends, and adopts a budget for the first year of the biennium and endorses but does not appropriate the funds for the second year. The second year budget is formally adopted after a mid-biennial review that includes any proposed Mayoral and Council revisions.

### **Budget Preparation**

During the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the year, the Department of Finance (DOF) works with departments to develop initial projections of revenues and spending for the upcoming biennium.

Budget proposals from Commissions should be submitted to appropriate department directors and copied to the Mayor by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter so department directors can review and potentially incorporate proposals into their budget proposal to the Mayor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. Commissions have sometimes scheduled a formal meeting with department Directors and/or the Mayor to outline budget proposals.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, DOF develops and shares budget guidelines and directions with City departments. Continuing programs and services that the City currently provides are usually considered a priority, along with previous commitments that will increase costs in the next biennium. Depending on the City's revenue, departments will be given

directions for increasing or decreasing their "baseline budget" (budget increments or decrements) based on Mayoral priorities.

Also during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, City Council sometimes identifies budget priorities to provide an early indication of their interest in programs and services that should be considered for funding, and sometimes produces a resolution that identifies budget priorities. The resolution can also provide guidance on long-range planning and City business practices.

During May and June, departments develop budget requests.

In July, DOF receives departmental proposed budgets and begins the analysis and evaluation process, culminating in the Mayor's proposed operating budget for two years. The Mayor typically presents his proposed budget to City Council in Council Chambers at the end of the September (the deadline for doing so is October 2<sup>nd</sup>).

### **Budget Adoption**

After the Mayor submits the proposed budget, the City Council often conducts one or more public hearings. The Council also holds committee meetings in open session to discuss budget requests with department representatives and DOF staff.

Councilmembers then recommend specific budget actions for consideration by their colleagues. After completing the public hearing and deliberative processes, and usually after making changes to the Mayor's proposed budget, the City Council adopts a budget through an ordinance passed by majority vote. As a part of the budget process, City Council also passes "budget provisos" and "statements of legislative intent." Budget provisos direct departments to use funding in a specific manner. Statements of legislative intent direct departments to conduct specific policy analysis and to report back to Council with the results on a given timeline.

The Mayor can choose to approve the Council's Budget, veto it, or let it become law without mayoral signature. The Mayor must veto the entire budget, or none of it. There is no line-item veto in Seattle.

### **Budget Amendment**

A majority of the City Council may, by ordinance, eliminate, decrease, or re-appropriate any unexpended appropriations during the year. The City Council, generally with a three-fourths vote, may also increase appropriations from available money to meet necessary expenditures that were not foreseeable during the formal biennial

## Commissioner's Handbook

budget development process. New appropriations related to the settlement of claims, emergency conditions, or laws enacted since passage of the annual operating budget ordinance require approval by a two-thirds vote of the City Council. The Finance Director may approve, without ordinance, appropriation transfers within a department or agency of up to 10 percent of the appropriation authority for the particular program category or, where appropriate, line item, being increased.

### Commission schedule related to budget process

1st quarter (Jan - March)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Identify budget issues of concern to the Commission</li><li>→ Identify department(s) likely to address concerns</li><li>→ Meet with Department Directors or designees to make budget inquiries, discuss concerns and make recommendations</li></ul>
2nd and 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarters (April - Sept)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Identify departmental liaisons and Council Committee Chairs with whom to track issues</li><li>→ Provide input to departments on budget proposals and issues</li></ul>
4th quarter (Oct - Dec)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Review Mayor's proposed budget</li><li>→ Communicate with Council Committee Chair overseeing specific budget requests</li><li>→ Attend and testify at hearings</li><li>→ Thank key people supporting budget requests</li><li>→ Identify budget provisos and statements of legislative intent to track in the following year</li></ul>

## 12. MEDIA CONTACT

You may be asked to represent your commission to the news media, including newspaper, radio, television, neighborhood publications, organizational newsletters, and other community-based media. In representing your commission, your goal is to maintain a cooperative and open relationship with the media without violating individuals' privacy or losing sight of your responsibilities as a Commissioner.

To facilitate a good working relationship with the media, each commission should:

- Designate a media spokesperson for the commission;
- Designate a media spokesperson for special public events and projects;



- Follow your established policies for media relations, and make use of SOCR staff for background and media contacts;
- Be as open as possible, while keeping your focus on the business of the commission;
- Not air dissatisfactions to the media, do not share conflicts with other commission members or City of Seattle staff, and keep personal opinions to yourself;
- Work with your SOCR staff liaison to coordinate publicity in the media. SOCR staff can help you get your message out effectively.

Also, remember:

- Your SOCR staff liaison and SOCR's public relations specialist are excellent resources for you to draw on when planning media contact. It is strongly recommended that you consult with SOCR staff prior to any significant contact with the news media.
- If you don't know the answer to a question or if you are unsure about an issue, consult with your SOCR staff liaison or SOCR Public Relations Specialist before issuing a statement. Do not answer media questions with speculation;
- Media are a tool for you to use. Anticipate when an event or issue has the potential to stir public interest, and use the media to communicate. Think ahead and act proactively.

Any and every statement you make to a reporter is a **public, quotable statement**. There is no such thing as a guaranteed "off the record remark." Anything you say to a media representative may appear in the press and may be highlighted in other public arenas, including courts of law. **Make sure your statements are accurate, unbiased, and represent the commission.**

## 13. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Commissions routinely use electronic communication, both to communicate with each other and to communicate with the public, including e-mail, the internet and e-newsletters.

### E-mail

Commissioners can choose to list a personal e-mail address on commission business cards. If you do so, your personal e-mail address is then a matter of public record. Remember, most e-mails that you send and receive, even on your personal computer, that are related to City business are subject to public disclosure.

### Internet and e-newsletters

Each of the commissions has a web site, and the capacity to establish and distribute an e-newsletter. Roles and responsibilities of commission staff and commissioners are detailed below.

#### Commission staff:

- Maintain and conduct routine web updates of basic commission information, including the commission mission, purpose, meeting schedule, work plan and membership list.
- Post new content on a weekly basis.
- Facilitate the establishment of new e-newsletters.

#### Commissioners:

- Provide updated web content beyond the routine content referenced above on an as-needed basis.
- Provide direction on the design of the commission website, while supporting City standards for Web presentation and accessibility  
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/pan/WebPresentationAccessibilityStandards.htm>
- If a commission has a member with technical expertise, the commission may be able to be more directly involved with the web site. This will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis with SOCR's Director of Policy and Outreach.
- (If an e-newsletter is to be developed and distributed) Provide the content for an e-newsletter and e-mail addresses of recipients of the initial newsletter.
- Provide direction on the design of the e-newsletter, while abiding by City Electronic Mailing List Policies  
<http://www.seattle.gov/pan/ListServicesPolicies.htm>

## 14. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCR AND COMMISSIONS

The ideal relationship between the SOCR and a commission is a partnership based on mutual interests and respect. Although the roles and responsibilities of the office and commissions are different, there are many areas of overlap and cooperation.

SOCR is part of the Executive Department of the City of Seattle. The Mayor is in charge of the Executive Department, which also includes the Office of Planning and Management, the Office of Intergovernmental Relations, the Office of Economic

## Commissioners' Handbook

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Development, and the Office of the Mayor. SOCR's Director sits on the Mayor's cabinet along with the directors of all City of Seattle departments. Employees of SOCR are employees of the City of Seattle, and are responsible to the Mayor.

The commission is a citizen's body established to provide advice to the Mayor, Seattle City Council, and all City of Seattle departments on special areas of interest (sexual minority issues, human rights, women's rights). Commissioners are volunteers. A commission may receive a request for information, testimony, advice, input, or some other type of involvement from the Mayor, the Seattle City Council, or any City of Seattle department. Each commission meets on a monthly basis, organizes an annual retreat, and develops a commission work plan including priority areas of focus, projects, and activities for the year.

SOCR provides professional and administrative support for each commission. SOCR's responsibility is to work together with the commissions to help make the work of the commissions successful. SOCR commission staff provides organization, communication, facilitation and research support, as follows:

### Organization

- Maintain and distribute full roster of Commissioners.
- Assist in recruitment, public relations, and communication with applicants.
- Facilitate communication with appointing authorities.
- Complete all paperwork for appointments.
- Arrange for SOCR Administration to update orientation materials (Commissioner Handbook, parking permits) for new Commissioners and update parking passes annually.

### Communication

- Maintain all correspondence, Commission files, Appointment files, Committee records and Commission reports.
- Distribute and ensure accurate and timely responses to Commission mail, requests and communications (phone, e-mail and written communication).
- Write and send monthly meeting minutes, Executive Committee notes and SOCR's monthly report to Commissioners.
- Forward timely issues of importance, legislative notices and City of Seattle-generated announcements to Commissioners.
- Maintain an accurate, vibrant and useful web site; update on a weekly basis.

## Commissioner's Handbook

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- Prepare weekly reports about Commission activity for SOCR Director and Policy and Outreach Director for weekly report to the Mayor.
- Assist in preparing materials, displays and hand-outs for Commission at public events.
- Assist with Commission correspondence.

### Facilitation

- Develop and maintain relationships with Mayor's representative for Boards and Commission, Legislative Assistants for City Councilmembers and the Get Engaged Program Lead.
- Assist in scheduling meetings between the Commission and the Mayor and City Councilmembers.
- Help support annual retreats.
- Field and respond to requests for information about the Commission, meetings with the Commission, and visitors at monthly meetings.
- Respond to requests (letter, e-mail and phone) from the public about issues of concern to the commissions. **Note:** *The Seattle Human Rights Commission has a special role in responding to appeals.*
- Facilitate meetings of international visitors with Commission members.
- Assist in coordinating and communicating with speakers for monthly meetings.
- Advise and assist Commission in planning public events (e.g.: Seattle Women's Summit, Human Rights Day, and Pride Parade).
- Staff Three Commission meetings on a rotating basis; write and distribute minutes.
- Inform SOCR Department Director and SOCR Director of Policy and Outreach of commission activities that have departmental or city-wide implications.

### Research

- Research city and community resources for and about women, sexual minorities and human rights.
- Identify city resources and publications for the commission committees and websites.
- Research legislative issues that affect the constituent groups served by the commissions in Seattle.

Other SOCR staff members (or staff from other offices) may be available to work with the commission to assist with research, provide information, clarify particular issues or policies, help organize an event or special project, or assist in other ways to ensure successful commission work. This cooperative relationship is organized on a case by case basis and at the request of the commission itself.

### **15. SUMMARY**

Participation on a City of Seattle board or commission is a very important community service and requires a significant commitment of time, energy and responsibility. You are commended for your willingness to represent the residents of Seattle through service on a commission.

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights and the City of Seattle hope that this handbook is of use to you as you carry out your responsibilities as a Commissioner. For more details on any topic, please contact SOCR staff for clarification and support.

Dynamic and successful boards and commissions are essential for the City of Seattle to truly represent its diverse communities and residents. Your energy and dedication will ensure this success.

*Thank You for Serving!*